

***“Thor Odinson... through your arrogance and stupidity you’ve opened these peaceful realms  
and innocent lives to the horror and desolation of war”:  
The Norse Renaissance in the Twenty-first Century***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

Beliefs of previous cultures can continue to echo throughout a new culture long after the old one is gone. American culture is influenced by the cultures of our ancestors who founded our country. Pieces of other cultures such as the Norse have also found their way into our lives through literature and entertainment. Through this analysis, I will compare the Norse myths to several modern works inspired by them. These modern works took ideas from Norse Mythology to build new stories influenced by their authors' imaginations, current society, and our culture.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Brent Blackwell for advising me throughout this project and for being part of the inspiration of it by teaching the colloquium on Thor, Ragnarök, and the end of the world.

Additionally, I want to say thank you to my friends for supporting me through this process. Specifically, I would like to thank my friends Mary Reams and Brian Voas for their feedback, motivation, and interest in my project.

## Process Analysis Statement

The research and background information that inspired this project was my honors colloquium “Thor, Ragnarök, and the End of the World.” Throughout the class, I read some of the original Norse myths, a few of the comic issues from *The Mighty Thor*, and watched the three Marvel *Thor* films. I decided to dive further into the world of Norse Mythology in order to better understand its impact and inspiration in modern works.

Despite the enjoyment I got from reading the books, the comics, and watching the movies, I struggled in the beginning with writing my thesis. I had all of these thoughts and ideas in my head that did not go together well or form a nice coherent argument. I began with a rough introduction and breakdown of the characters I thought best to focus on and compare, yet after writing this, I still felt at a loss on where to go. I knew I wanted to connect everything to the event of Ragnarök towards the end of the paper, so I decided to write out my thoughts on it with the intention of using my other ideas to fill in the gaps where they best fit later. I composed my entire paper rather backwards including the introduction. The description of the characters was written out first. Then, I typed the summary of each source followed by finally devising the opening paragraph.

To help me discern topics, stories, and ideas that needed to be included or explained in the paper to bring everything to a point at Ragnarök, I spent a few hours in the library one day outlining everything on a dry erase board. I listed everything I made a point of mentioning in and around Ragnarök. Then, I glanced through my notes, writing down similarities between *The Norse Myths* I had noted and that particular work. This strategy really helped with what I wanted to try to include; although, it was not as helpful as I had hoped with ordering the topics within the paper.

I often wanted to analyze inconsistencies and unrelated information I came across instead of information pertinent to my topic like the inconsistency of Odin's appearance throughout the Marvel movie franchise. Odin's appearance, representing his age, was changed a few times. He clearly looked younger during flashbacks to Thor's childhood in *Thor* than he did when Hela brings down the ceiling in the throne room in *Thor: Ragnarök*. In the painting, Odin looks the same age he did in present day.

I make several references to Ragnarök and the fates of the gods throughout the paper. This is very reminiscent of how *The Norse Myths* tend to read with mentions of the gods knowing they will die and how Freyr will regret not having his sword at his side for Ragnarök. It is difficult if not impossible to not discuss Ragnarök in the context of the rest of the Norse world because it is such a vital piece, woven throughout every facet that makes up their universe. When Muspelheim is explained, all we learn is that it is a land of fire. And who lives there? The fire giants led by Surt. What else do we know about them? Only that they will fight against the gods at Ragnarök, and Surt will destroy the nine realms. As Crossley-Holland's compilation drops hints of Ragnarök without explaining its details, so too does this paper continuously refer to Ragnarök before diving into its specifics at the end.

**“Thor Odinson... through your arrogance and stupidity you’ve opened these peaceful realms and innocent lives to the horror and desolation of war”:**

### **The Norse Renaissance in the Twenty-first Century**

Mythologies from long ago still inform and influence our lives today, especially in our language and our entertainment. This paper discusses the prevalence and influence of the Norse myths, particularly Ragnarök in the modern Marvel comic and film franchises of Thor and *The Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* series by Rick Riordan. Kevin Crossley-Holland translates, edits, and collects the Norse myths in his book, *The Norse Myths*. This book will be used to compare the modern retellings with the ancient Norse myths themselves.

What we call Norse Mythology today was in essence the religion of the Norse people. The Old Norse Religion was practiced by those who lived-in modern-day Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Greenland, and portions of the British Isles; these people were converted to Christianity throughout the tenth to twelfth centuries (McCoy). As with any culture, their religion was the foundation of their way of life. It represents how they viewed the world, what characteristics they valued, and provides a glimpse to how they explained the world around them. The Norse came from a cold climate with land largely unsuited for agriculture. They were explorers. Who traveled from Scandinavia to settle modern-day Iceland, Greenland, and parts of Russia. They temporarily settled eastern portions of modern-day Canada as well (“Vikings”). This is reflected in their stories and their myths, which are full of characters, usually Thor, going off on an adventure to Jotunheim just as the Norse left Scandinavia for new lands. The warrior lifestyle and Norse way is depicted by Thor, the god of the people, who they revered and trusted the most of their gods.

*The Norse Myths* is a retelling of the Norse myths as short stories. Before diving into the myths, Crossley-Holland describes the cosmology and pantheon of Norse Mythology. Though there is debate on the number, the Norse depict their universe as a collection of only nine interconnected worlds. However, ten are mentioned throughout the mythology. The worlds are

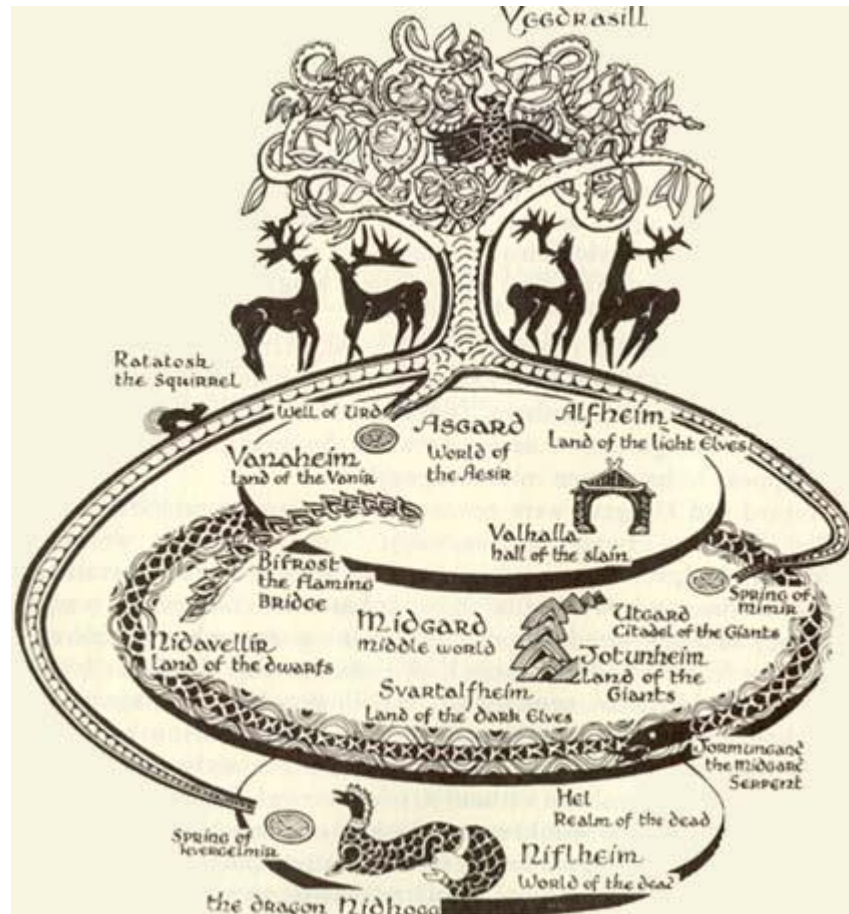


Figure 1. This image represents the tricentric structure of the Norse universe (Crossley-Holland xxii).

Asgard (home of the gods), Vanaheim (home of the Vanir), Alfheim (home of the elves), Midgard (Earth), Jotunheim (home of the giants), Nidavellir (home of the dwarfs), Svartalfheim (home of the dark elves), Hel (land of the dead), Niflheim (land of ice), and Muspellheim (land of fire). These realms are connected through the branches of Yggdrasill, the World Tree that houses and links all the worlds. This universe was described as a tricentric structure, which can be viewed in the figure above. The top plane held Asgard, Vanaheim, and Alfheim. The second level contained Midgard, Jotunheim, Nidavellir, and Svartalfheim. There was a main route of travel connecting these two levels via Asgard and Midgard called the Bifrost or Rainbow Bridge.

Within the bottom plane lied Hel and Niflheim. Crossley-Holland depicts Muspellheim as having no place in this universe structure; therefore, making it the tenth or “extra” world (xx-xxiii).

There are two groups of gods called the Aesir, residents of Asgard, and the Vanir, inhabitants of Vanaheim. The einherjar, dead warriors from Earth who fell in battle, were residents of Asgard as well; they were housed in a hall named Valhalla. Alfheim was home of the light elves. Of course, Midgard or Earth was inhabited by human beings. The giants lived in Jotunheim. Nidavellir was the world of the dwarfs; Svartalfheim was the realm of the dark elves considered by some to be the same as dwarfs. Hel and Niflheim were lands of the dead. Muspellheim, a land of fire, was populated by fire giants (Crossley-Holland xx-xxii).

As Crossley-Holland’s book is a collection of thirty-two of the Norse myths, they do not follow any fixed timeline. Many of the stories feature Odin<sup>1</sup> ruler of Asgard, god of war, battle, and poetry. Several myths follow Thor<sup>2</sup>, god of thunder, and Loki, the trickster, on their adventures. Other major Aesir include Balder<sup>3</sup>, son of Odin, and Heimdall, watchman for the gods. The main Vanir characters are Njord and his children, Freyr<sup>4</sup>, god of plenty, and Freyja, goddess of love. These myths include many fights with giants, Odin’s display of wisdom, Loki’s change of character, and Freyja’s love of beautiful jewelry. The themes connecting these stories is the beginning and end of the worlds; references to these events are littered throughout these tales (xxv-xxx).

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<sup>1</sup> The select Old Norse letters used in this paper to demonstrate the Anglicization of some of these Norse names are ð, Þ, and ó. A ð equates to English d. Several spellings of the names change when they were anglicized and/or change with the modern author, yet all refer to the same character. (ON) represents the Old Norse spelling. (CH) represents Crossley-Holland’s spelling in. (MF) represents the Marvel franchise spelling. (RR) represents Rick Riordan’s spelling. Oðinn (ON) Odin (CH, MF, RR)

<sup>2</sup> A Þ equates to English th, and ó is o. Þórr (ON) Thor (CH, MF, RR)

<sup>3</sup> Baldr (ON) Balder (CH, MF, RR)

<sup>4</sup> Freyr (CH) Frey (RR)

As most religions contain a creation story of the world, they also allude to its end. Christians call their end times the Last Judgement; the Norse refer to it as Ragnarök. This event is explained as a foretold destiny for the Aesir and their enemies that cannot be altered. Ragnarök is a great battle that leads to the end of the Norse universe as they knew it. The major gods like Odin and Thor perish. All the realms literally burn. The only living gods left are their descendants, who have only been glimpsed before this. These survivors include Vidar and Vali, sons of Odin and different giantesses; Balder and Hod, sons of Odin and Frigg; and Modi and Magni, sons of Thor. Life goes on in a new world order (Crossley-Holland 175, 234).

Similar to *The Norse Myths*, The Marvel Comics series *The Mighty Thor* mainly focusses on Thor and his adventures. This analysis includes issues 302, 336 to 354, and 375. At the beginning of the Ragnarök storyline in issues 336 to 354 of *The Mighty Thor*, Thor is living on Midgard under an assumed mortal identity. He recently learned he is a son of Odin and the Earth-goddess Gaia, so Thor decided to make Midgard his home (302.8). He works as a doctor, but also spends time as a superhero (338.3-4). The story follows the beginnings of Ragnarök, the attempts to prevent it, and the failure to stop it.

In the Marvel movies, Thor continues to be the main character. In the Marvel film franchise *Thor*, frost giants from Jotunheim break into Asgard's weapons vault and in the process, kill the guards on duty. In his understandable outrage, Thor demands an attack on Jotunheim. Although Odin forbids it, Thor journeys to Jotunheim with Sif, Loki, and a few other Asgardians. Odin banishes Thor to Midgard after attacking Jotunheim against his orders. Thor returns to Asgard after proving himself worthy of the throne to find Loki has orchestrated all of these events with the giants to earn Odin's approval.



The second installment of the Marvel film franchise *Thor: Dark World* begins with Odin sentencing Loki to imprisonment for his crimes in the *Avengers* film, when Loki tried to conquer Earth. The new adversary is Malekith a dark elf from Svartalfheim; he is searching for a power his people once possessed called the Aether. Odin's father, Bor, hid it away long ago. Along with Loki's help, Thor manages to defeat Malekith.

The most recent film *Thor: Ragnarök* introduces a new villain named Hela<sup>5</sup>, Odin's firstborn. She was exiled by Odin before Thor's birth for her bloodthirsty ambition. Now that Odin is dead, she is determined to put herself on Asgard's throne. Thor teams with Loki, a Valkyrie, the Hulk, Heimdall, and some new friends from space to fight Hela.

Rick Riordan's book series, *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* centers around a teenager, demigod named Magnus Chase, son of Frey, from Boston. Shortly after the first book starts, Magnus dies in a battle against Surtur<sup>6</sup> over Sumarbrander, or the Sword of Summer. He is immediately taken by Samirah al-Abbas (Sam), a Valkyrie, to his afterlife in Valhalla where he becomes an einherjar, those honorable warriors who died in battle. During this first story, Magnus, Sam, a dwarf, and an elf stop giants from freeing Fenris<sup>7</sup> Wolf, which would have been a step towards Ragnarök (Riordan, *The Sword of Summer* 57-58, 74-75, 128, 457).

In Riordan's following book, *The Hammer of Thor*, the driving force is the theft of Thor's hammer Mjolnir and subsequent journey to recover it. The reader follows the group of heroes as they discover that Loki masterminded the giants' stealing Mjolnir in order to force them to locate the only sword that can cut his chains. To receive the hammer and sword, Loki arranges a marriage between Sam, his daughter, and Thrym, the giant who holds Mjolnir. Alex,

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<sup>5</sup> Hel (CH, RR) Hela (MF)

<sup>6</sup> Surt (CH, RR) Surtur (MF) Surtr

<sup>7</sup> Fenrir (CH) Fenris (MF, RR)

another child of Loki, switches places with Sam on the day of the wedding when the heroes attempt to prevent the freeing of Loki. They successfully retrieve Thor's stolen hammer; unfortunately, they fail to keep Loki bound (70, 400, 423, 427). This book heavily draws from the myth "The Lay of Thrym" in which Mjolnir is stolen by the giant Thrym, who wants Freyja as his bride. Instead of her, Thor disguises himself as the bride to retrieve his hammer. Aspects of "The Binding of Loki" myth are present as well, describing how Loki is bound with a snake dripping acid onto his face and his wife trying to catch as much as she can in a bowl prior to the initiation of Ragnarök (Crossley-Holland 70-74, 171-172).

In *The Ship of the Dead*, Magnus and his friends are tasked with stopping Loki from completing the construction of Naglfar, the ship of nails, which will sail Loki and an army of giants to Ragnarök. To stop him, they collect Kvasir's Mead, a drink that will provide a person with temporary wisdom and poetry, from the giants. Their idea is Kvasir's Mead will allow Magnus to beat Loki in a flyting, a contest where the parties exchange insults. Then, the heroes sail on to Niflheim. After the flyting, Loki is trapped in a magical nutshell and delivered to the gods to be rebound. By preventing Naglfar from sailing, the characters delay Ragnarök (297-299, 316, 376).

Many elements that make up the Norse World in *The Norse Myths* appear in these comics, films, and books. All of these universes at least minimally mention Asgard, Midgard, the Bifrost, einherjar, dwarfs, and giants. Tying together each storyline is the looming threat of Ragnarök – the end of the world as the Norse knew it. This event was a predestined fate, when the gods led by Odin would have a final battle against the giants led by a fire giant called Surt. All of the gods know their role at Ragnarök and who they will slay and who will slay them. Surt will burn every realm, destroying them (Crossley-Holland 174-175).

The most noticeable similarities among these works are the main Norse gods who play roles in the stories. These characters include Odin, Loki, Thor, Sif, Heimdall, and Freyr. Overall, several of these gods remain true to their Norse identities. For example, Odin is always King and Thor his son. Yet, many details and sometimes traits change, such as Loki having no children or Sif's trademark gold hair turning black.

An obvious shift of the gods among these works is the metamorphosis on how the author views them. The Norse saw them as gods or deities; they were immortal unless killed. Marvel turned them into another race in the cosmos and sometimes called them superheroes. Marvel's interpretation is best explained in an exchange between Odin and Loki in the second *Thor* film *Dark World*. Odin declares, "We are not gods. We are born; we live; we die. Just as humans do." Loki responds, "Give or take 5,000 years." In this discussion, Marvel makes it clear that the race residing on Asgard is not seen as immortal gods. Then Riordan's series, which came out between *Thor: Dark World* and *Thor: Ragnarök*, turned them back into immortal gods.

Perhaps the character that remains the most similar over the course of the different stories is the King of the Aesir, Odin, the Allfather. He is always the ruler of the Aesir with his palace on Asgard, and he is depicted as an old and wise ruler. Odin is considered the god of battle, war, and poetry; he also held the power of foresight. He is married to an Aesir goddess named Frigg, who is associated with motherhood, fertility, and prophecy. Together they had

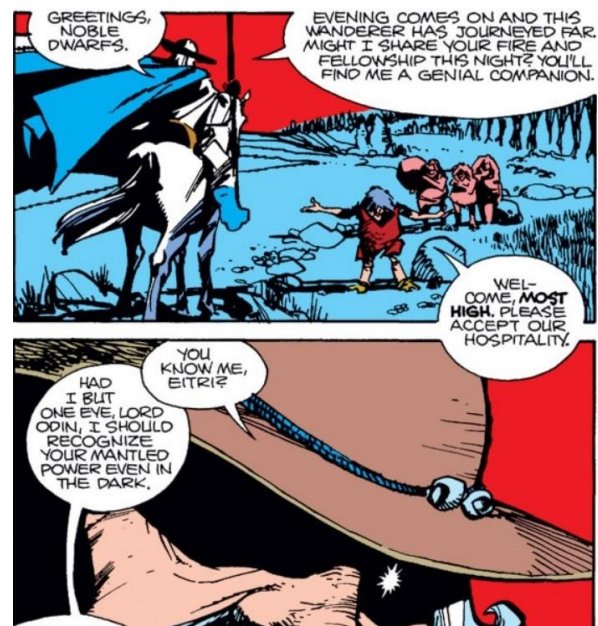


Figure 2. This is an example of Odin disguising himself in *The Mighty Thor* (339.6).

Balder and Hod, their sons. Odin also had several other children: Thor, Tyr, Bragi, Vali, and Vidar each with a different mother (Crossley-Holland xxvi-xxxi). Riordan also makes a point to have Odin disguised as an einherjar throughout *The Sword of Summer* (474). Odin often wears disguises in the original myths. He often appears as a wanderer wearing a large hat (Crossley-Holland 75). Odin has a disguise fitting this wanderer description in the comics when he tries in vain to mask himself from the dwarfs pictured on the previous page (339.6).

Loki stays similar to his original character as a schemer using his powers of illusion and shapeshifting to attain his own agenda. He lives among the Aesir on Asgard, but his parents are giants. Loki is considered a foster brother to Odin by the Norse (Crossley-Holland xxix). This simple detail about Loki changes in the modern Marvel franchises, where he is an adopted son of Odin. The biggest change Loki undergoes is his *bildungsroman*, or growth as a character. In *The Norse Myths*, Loki goes from a relatively good character with a trickster streak to an evil and jaded god. During the myth “Building of Asgard’s Wall,” Loki suggests giving a builder six months to rebuild Asgard’s wall after their war with the Vanir. Months later when it becomes clear the builder will finish on time, Odin demands Loki find a way out of the wager. Loki shifts into a mare to distract the builder’s horse, so the work cannot continue. This night results in the birth of Sleipnir, Odin’s eight-legged steed. I think “Treasures of the Gods” is the best example of the trickster characteristic of Loki. He sneaks into Sif’s bedroom and cuts off her beautiful blonde hair. At Thor’s violent insistence, Loki later obtains hair made of actual golden strands for Sif made by dwarfs. Loki’s final descent to evil comes in “Loki’s Flyting.” While the gods and goddesses feast, Loki exchanges insults with those present. He airs out the truths and flaws of them, such as pointing out Freyja’s many bed partners, how Tyr lost a hand to Fenrir, the

wolf, and when Thor will watch Odin die unable to stop it (Crossley-Holland 10-14, 48, 52, 164-167).

We see an opposite character arc in the Marvel franchise: a character's redemption story instead of one's downfall. In the comics, Loki schemes against Thor by working with a witch called Lorelei to enchant Thor so that she can manipulate him (338.18, 342.18). Yet by the end of this story arc, he arrives to fight alongside Thor and Odin in the battle against Surtur (353.5).



Figure 4. Loki and Thor fighting each other in *Thor*.



Figure 4. Thor, a Valkyrie, and Loki facing Hela in *Thor: Ragnarök*.

The different arc can especially be viewed in the films, where Loki begins as the main villain in *Thor*, wreaking havoc trying to destroy Jotunheim and the giants that live there. In the second film, Loki works with Thor against the dark elves only to fake his own death and take the throne by impersonating Odin. Loki turns into full ally of Thor in *Thor: Ragnarök* by arriving to fight with Thor against Hela. This is an interesting flip done by Marvel displayed above with the figure on the left showing a physical confrontation between Thor and Loki in *Thor* and them preparing for the fight against Hela on the right. It makes the Loki character extremely dynamic and has resulted in many Marvel fans also being Loki fans.

The character arc of Loki does not exist in Riordan's series because Riordan's storyline starts after the binding of Loki. The god is evil from the beginning of the series to the end. He spends his time in the series whispering in characters' thoughts and manipulating events in attempt to escape his bonds and start Ragnarök.

In *The Norse Myths*, Loki has many children; the most important for this analysis are Hel, Jormungand, and Fenrir. Hel is the goddess of death and resides in Hel, where she guards over her portion of the dead (xxx, 159). *Thor: Ragnarök* changes Hela to Odin's firstborn and Thor's sister; whereas, *The Mighty Thor* and Riordan keep Hel as Loki's daughter (375.7; *Hotel Valhalla Guide to the Norse Worlds* 55). She at least briefly appears in each work, always as the goddess of death. Marvel's modification of this character stems from requiring a new villain for *Thor: Ragnarök*, since Malekith, the previous enemy from *Thor: Dark World*, was destroyed. The Marvel franchise never wrote in a wife for Loki in either the films or the comics, and his children are completely absent from the films. As it is made clear in the first *Thor* film, Loki grew up with Thor, so Thor would have known if Loki had fathered any children, which then eliminates Loki as a candidate to be Hela's father. Riordan, on the other hand, has no need for this character to step out of her original role. He already includes Fenris and Jormungand as children of Loki in his retelling, which makes it natural to keep Hel as ruler of Helheim and daughter of Loki (*The Sword of Summer* 194). Similarly in *The Mighty Thor*, Hela's role is to rule in Hel. It seems Marvel could easily keep her as Loki's daughter because it was a logical way to give a reason to why he would look to her for help with another scheme of his. Although we never hear of her in *The Mighty Thor* or in the *Thor* film franchise, Sigyn does make an appearance in *The Hammer of Thor* as Loki's loyal wife holding a bowl to catch snake venom, which is one of the key steps in bringing about Ragnarök (404-406).

Like Loki, there is another character who stays similar in the modern works to their Norse version, save for a few modifications. Thor, the god of thunder and the sky, was the son of Odin and Earth. Thor is known for his strength and his weapon Mjolnir, a hammer made by dwarfs. He often uses these in fights against giants. Unfortunately, Thor is far more brawn than



Figure 5. This image shows a small portion of Thor's fight against the forces from Faerie when he strategizes a way to repel them (346.19-20).

present whether they were directly involved or not. He vaguely thinks about Loki's involvement in the situation deciding to settle that one day, yet Thor seems to forget about it and never punishes Loki (Crossley-Holland 129-132, 251). The modern versions of Thor's intelligence get varied across the spectrum. A more noble and intelligent Thor was created by the comics. During a fight against Malekith, the dark elf, Thor realizes the dogs of Faerie, which is the realm Malekith is from in the comics (not Svartalfheim), are not attacking in full force because they are fighting on a bridge. Inhabitants from Faerie are susceptible to iron, so Thor takes an iron beam and uses it to repel the attack depicted in the figures above (346.19-20). The Marvel movie Thor changes a bit more.

The first *Thor* film depicts a rash and child-like god who races to kill giants with no thought to the consequences. Early in the film, giants break into the weapons vault and are killed by the guard. In his fit of rage, Thor demands revenge, but Odin forbids it to avoid the

destruction of war. Thor convinces his friends to go to Jotunheim anyway, which almost results in his friends' deaths. For his brash actions, Thor is banished to Earth by Odin.

In *Thor: Dark World*, Thor seems to have matured since the first movie. During this film, again defying Odin's orders, Thor develops a plan to escape from Asgard with many working pieces. With the Bifrost closed, Thor breaks Loki out of the dungeon because Loki knows other ways to leave the realm. They escape the palace and use a large ship as a decoy while fleeing onto a friend's smaller ship.

By the third instalment *Thor: Ragnarök*, Thor has changed from the other two movies and continues to develop over the course of this movie. At the beginning, Thor realizes Loki is posing as Odin and forces him to take them to their father. Then when Hela appears in front of him, Thor attacks her without considering how outmatched he might be. Later in the story he learns more control over his powers and offers Loki advice about growing and changing (*Thor: Ragnarök*).

Looking across the three *Thor* films, Thor is clearly shown to be maturing from the rash, reckless god resembling Thor from the myths into a wiser, more levelheaded god and king by the end of *Thor: Ragnarök*. This makes Thor a dynamic character, whereas in the myths, he was a more static character where he remains dumb utilizing his strength over his brain.

And finally, of all the depictions, Riordan writes a Thor dumber than the one portrayed in the myths. This Thor was an almost silly character as the author made a point to have Thor fart in each of his scenes. His clothes are described as filthy, and his body is covered in tattoos. When he first appears in the story, he has to be rescued from a giantess by an einherjar, a Valkyrie, and an elf. (*The Sword of Summer* 357, 360-361). Thor from the myths never required a rescue from a giant. Even in "Thor and Geirrod" when Thor is greatly outnumbered and does not have



Mjolnir, he defeats every giant there with ease (Crossley-Holland 132). After rescuing him, Thor gives the group contradictory instructions to go find out if a giant has his hammer because apparently no one is supposed to know it is missing. He tells them:

Just go to Geirrod's fortress and check for my hammer. Of course, it's important you don't let on that it is missing. If Geirrod doesn't have it, we don't want him to know that I don't have it. But if he doesn't have it, obviously ask him if he knows who does, without actually admitting that it is missing. (*The Sword of Summer* 366)

The group meets with Thor again in Riordan's second book, *The Hammer of Thor*. They explain that they discovered his stolen hammer was buried eight miles beneath the earth by a giant. Thor immediately reveals his predictable plan: "We must kill them all!" He does not consider how to actually retrieve his hammer nor the consequence of killing the one person who knows its location (362-363).

Overall, the main change witnessed in Thor is similar to the one observed in Loki. The characters' developments change with Thor's intelligence or lack of and Loki's good or evil struggle. The Marvel films beautifully match the relationship between these two characters from the myths not replicated in the comics or by Riordan. Loki and Thor are compliments to each other best explained in "Thor's Journey to Utgard," when Loki, speaking to Thor claims, "In Utgard, you'll need sharp wits [...] And yours are as blunt as a hammer. Why not take me?" (Crossley-Holland 80). *The Norse Myths* describe many adventures of Thor and Loki together, yet they also portray the tricks and manipulation of Loki. Marvel matches this dynamic with them working together to escape Asgard in *Thor: Dark World* and to defeat Hela in *Thor: Ragnarök*, yet with tricks and illusions Loki continuously schemes to achieve his own goals of power. The smaller changes of these two characters are also similar. Both lack their children in

the Marvel films, although, Loki keeps his in the comics. Both are missing their wives in the Marvel franchise yet regain them in Riordan's series. However, Thor's wife Sif does not completely disappear in Marvel, just her relationship with him changes.

Sif is a female figure who makes appearances throughout all the stories. In the myths, she is first introduced as Thor's wife. In "The Treasurers of the Gods," Loki creeps into Sif's bedroom as she sleeps to cut off her hair. He eventually replaces Sif's hair with golden strands spun by dwarfs (Crossley-Holland 48, 52). This is referred to by Riordan, when the characters meet Sif. She uses her golden hair as payment for the heroes (356). Marvel depicts Sif with dark hair and redoes her personality in both the comics and movies. She becomes a warrior goddess instead of the goddess of fertility (340.4, *Thor*). Sif is not considered Thor's wife, but his betrothed in the comics, and there is no love story between them in the films at all (336.4).

One character does not change his personality, but his role in the story changes. Freyr, god of plenty, plays a rather minor role in the original myths. In "The War of the Aesir and Vanir," he takes part in the exchange of gods between the Aesir and Vanir alongside his father Njord and sister Freyja to cement a truce between the two warring races. Another myth, "Skirnir's Journey" tells how he gives away his sword that is designed to slay giants all on its own to his friend Skirnir. It serves as payment for Skirnir is charged to bring Freyr the giantess he fell in love with from Jotunheim so that he can marry her (Crossley-Holland 8, 55). Riordan's Freyr plays a generally larger role in the story because his demigod son, Magnus, is the main character of the series. *The Sword of Summer* is named in reference to Freyr's sword and is a major part of Riordan's story (469). This is the sword that exists in *The Norse Myths*; it is the sword he gives away in "Skirnir's Journey" (Crossley-Holland 55). The sword keeps its ability to fight on its own in Riordan's series. Frey giving up his sword is referred to in *The Sword of*

*Summer* (326, 469). In the third book, *The Ship of the Dead*, Skidbladnir, Frey's ship that can be folded small enough to carry, is gifted by Frey to Magnus for his journey to Niflheim (Riordan, 53). Like Frey's sword, his ship is also from the myths. Skidbladnir is gifted to Freyr by dwarfs in "The Treasures of the Gods" (Crossley-Holland 51). In the Marvel comic and film franchises, Freyr's role becomes nonexistent, though he exists in the original comic series.

A character whose role stays the same, but his personality changes is Heimdall. He is the watchman of the gods standing guard at his post on the Bifrost. Heimdall makes for an excellent watchman because it is said he can hear grass growing, see a hundred leagues away, and hardly requires sleep. Additionally in "The Song of Rig," Heimdall is found to be charismatic. As he journeys across the Land, he convinces each couple he lodges with to give him the best seat by their fire and allow him to sleep in their bed (Crossley-Holland 18-23). Heimdall is described as a warrior, a fairly stoic figure, and an adversary of Loki throughout *The Norse Myths* and Marvel works.

However, readers see quite a different Heimdall in Riordan's story. No longer a solemn character, this Heimdall greets visitors on the Bifrost with selfies and great cheer (*The Hammer of Thor* 251-252). He later leaves his post on the bridge to accompany Thor and Vidar, when they try to help the einherjar keep Loki bound in *The Hammer of Thor* (426-428). Even though his personality changes, Heimdall's backstory remains the same in this retelling. He still has his ram's horn Gjallarhorn which he will blast at the coming of Ragnarök; he sees and hears across the nine worlds; and he stands watch on the Rainbow Bridge (Riordan, *Hotel Valhalla Guide to the Norse World* 58-59).

It should not come as a surprise that some details and traits of the Norse gods change in the modern works. The goals of these authors, specifically Marvel, is not to retell the Norse

myths in their entirety. They use these myths as inspiration for their own stories. The authors built their creations on the names and basics of the Norse myths; then, they made the necessary changes to better fit these characters into the story they wanted to tell. I think the best example of this is the character Loki, who became Thor's adopted brother instead of Odin's for the Marvel comic and film franchises. This fits into the storyline of *Thor* where Loki sets off a chain reaction of events because he desires Odin's fatherly approval. Loki's motive for this scheme only makes sense if he is considered a son to Odin and not his brother. The adventures of Thor and Loki throughout *The Norse Myths* make this switch all the easier to make because the relationship between these two closely imitates a brotherly bond instead of a relationship between nephew and uncle.

Many of the stories told in *The Norse Myths* appear in these other materials. They arise as almost exact retellings, are mentioned in reference, and can be spotted as the inspiration of a new story. The collection of Norse myths retold by Crossley-Holland do not tell one continuous story. It is a jumble of separate short stories that were told and written by different people, who had their own personal beliefs. Incorporating all of these myths would be difficult, if not impossible, yet the inspiration these authors have taken leads to an interesting comparison to the old myths, specifically in the depiction of Ragnarök.

In "Thor and Geirrod," Crossley-Holland tells of a time Thor and Loki went to the home of Geirrod, a giant. On the journey, they cross a river that rises as they wade through it. Geirrod's daughter stood upstream over the river while her menstrual blood spilled into it. Thor saves them by catching ahold of a rowan tree. At Geirrod's home, Gjarp and Griep, his daughters, try to crush Thor between a chair and the roof. He kills them instead. Geirrod thinking to play games

with Thor throws a ball of hot iron at him. Instead Thor catches it, throws it back, and kills everyone in the hall (130-132).

This story reappears nearly the same in *The Sword of Summer*. Thor is found in the river, alone (Loki is already bound) by Magnus and his friends. He clings to a bush as he used a rowan tree previously. Once again, the giantess causes Thor's problems, but this time by using her body to narrow the width of the river, which increases its velocity. Magnus kills the giantess to save Thor (Riordan 351-357). Instead of Thor, Magnus and his friends continue on to the giant's home. The giantesses, also named Gjalp and Griep, try to crush Magnus and the Valkyrie between their chair and the ceiling. After killing the sisters, Geirrod comes home. To prevent him from finding his dead daughters, the group allows themselves to be drawn into Geirrod's game. As Geirrod hurls hot coals across the room, the adventurers run from column to column until Geirrod brings the ceiling down on himself (Riordan, *The Sword of Summer*, 390, 402-405).

The inspiration Riordan took from "Thor and Geirrod" for his book is clearly seen because it is an almost exact retelling of the Norse myth. The main events of the story – the rising river, the giants' home, and the giants' defeat – remain the same. There are pieces of "Thor and Geirrod" that change, although, they are understandable. Loki is not present in the retelling as he is already chained in Riordan's timeline. Riordan's series does not focus on Thor, so his major role from the myth has to be replaced by Riordan's main character Magnus.

Riordan's series following the life (and sometimes life after death) of the children of the gods rather than the gods themselves is a clear change in path from *The Norse Myths* and Marvel's franchises. Riordan is known primarily for his writing for teen books. If his audience is young adults and he wants to set the story in modern day so that it is familiar to them, then it further seems logical to have most of those old myths occur centuries before and choose the child

of a god. By making Magnus a demigod instead of a full god and the same age as many readers, the audience can relate more to the character. For instance, some of Magnus' struggles are normal teenage ones like dealing with his first crush and having his first kiss.

However, the Marvel franchises do not have any exact retellings of the Norse myths like Riordan. While the storylines of the movies and films would not have easily allowed for a mythological retelling, I think Marvel could have included one if they really wanted. The comics could have done a close retelling of "Balder's Dreams" as there is a scene that alludes to it when Balder sees glimpses of a dark future. During his visit with the Fates or Norns, three female beings who decide the destiny of gods and men, Balder observes a vast darkness that represents Ragnarök and the end of the world that comes with it. The figure to the right shows when Balder realizes that his death plays a major role in the end of the cosmos (348.6-8).



Figure 6. This image shows the darkness Balder is observing when he visits the Norns (348.8).

There are far more instances of Marvel and Riordan taking inspiration from Norse Mythology than full retellings of a myth. An example of inspiration all the works utilized is their use of the dwarfs. Throughout Norse Mythology dwarfs continue to make an appearance, sometimes filling an essential role. These myths include "The Treasure of the Gods," "The Necklace of Brisings," "Otter's Ransom," and "The Lay of Alvis." The most lasting influence of the dwarfs that infiltrates the rest of mythology is their craftsmanship best displayed in "The Treasure of the Gods."

Dwarfs were the greatest craftsmen of the cosmos, forging the greatest treasures of the gods. They forged Odin's spear Gungnir, Sif's golden hair, and Thor's legendary hammer Mjolnir. This strength of the dwarfs is kept in all three works. The dwarfs were made valuable enough in the comics that Odin seeks out their help to create a new weapon (339.5). In the films, Gungnir and Mjolnir are distinctive symbols of Odin and Thor, respectively. They also symbolize the power of these two characters. When Loki takes control of Asgard's throne in *Thor*, he carries with him Gungnir. This is observed again in *Thor: Ragnarök* when Thor uses Gungnir to distract Hela. He draws her full attention to protecting the throne she desires so much. After Odin takes Mjolnir from his son, Thor seems to be completely powerless until his hammer is returned to him. Riordan exhibits the value of Mjolnir as well when it is stolen in *The Hammer of Thor*. The heroes are quietly sent to retrieve it as to not alert the rest of the world (mainly the giants) that Thor did not have his hammer.

In the original myths, however, dwarfs had a detrimental weakness. They would turn to stone if touched by the sun's rays. It is for this reason that the Norse placed Nidavellir underground (Crossley-Holland xxi, 50-51, 146). Riordan pays homage to this weakness when one turns to stone in *The Hammer of Thor*. But he invents a cure for this: running fresh water over the petrified dwarf will bring him back (221). It is not clear if the comics kept this weakness. When Odin seeks out the dwarfs, he travels to Nidavellir.

IT IS DUSK WHEN A SOLITARY RIDER CRESTS THE DIVIDE THAT OVERLOOKS NIDAVELLIR, THE REALM OF THE DWARFS...



As the figure on the left shows, the world is clearly not fully underground or cave-like because trees and mountains can be seen, yet in the top right figure the dwarf references that they live underground. There is even a time when the sky is colored blue shown in the bottom right figure, which leads me to believe Marvel largely disregarded the dwarven sun intolerance (339.6-7).

Another myth including the dwarfs is when Freyja,



goddess of love, was captivated by a necklace four dwarfs had crafted. They would only give it to her if she spent a night with each of them (Crossley-Holland 65-67). There are a few



references to this myth by Riordan. The myth about Freya sleeping with dwarfs is used as inspiration to explain the dark

Figure 7. These panels from *The Mighty Thor* depict Odin speaking with dwarfs in Nidavellir 339.6-7).

elves also called svartalfs. In Riordan's telling, dark elves are dwarfs descended from Freya. They are said to be taller and more handsome than dwarfs but are otherwise the same. Blitzen, a dark elf friend of Magnus' is a child of Freya and a dwarf. When Freya is described, there is



mention of her touching a golden necklace she wears, which is the one she slept with dwarfs to obtain (*The Sword of Summer* 274, 281, 284-287).

This is a very different interpretation of dark elves than observed in *The Mighty Thor*. Here dark elves are understood to be fairies with a physical appearance close to humans. Most have long, flowing hair as depicted in the figure to the below (346.9-11, 348.19). They are from the realm of Faerie (347.2). The original myths never describe what the dark elves are, only that they had their own world called Svartalfheim. As shown in the figure to the left in the comics,



Figure 8. The fairies are fleeing the sunlight after the partial destruction of the roof of the cave (348.19).

their realm is underground because as one fairy says, “We cannot stand the light!” I do criticize Marvel here for appearing to know about the existence of a weakness to sunlight, yet they did not seem to include it with the dwarfs (339.6-7, 348.19).

Marvel recreated their version of dark elves in the second *Thor* film, *Dark World*. The race is no longer referred to as fairies from Faerie but svartalfs from Svartalfheim. They existed thousands of years ago when most died in battle against Bor, King of Asgard and father of Odin. Their leader Malekith, also the fairy leader in the comics, makes a reappearance in *Thor: Dark World*. In the figure to the right stand Malekith and his general, Kurse. These svartalfs have a very different appearance from their comic counterparts. The



Figure 9. This image shows Malekith and Kurse in *Thor: Dark World*.

long, flowing hair is replaced with no hair. They sport pointed ears and exaggerated eyebrow lines, which is a clear influence of the depictions of elves in modern fantasy fiction.

I actually like Marvel's explanation of what dark elves are better than Riordan's because this race is given its own world and separate characteristics; whereas Riordan makes them a subset of dwarfs, and Svartalfheim becomes a place within the realm of Nidavellir (*The Sword of Summer* 153). Specifically, I am partial to the film's dark elves because they use the correct terminology by calling them svartalfs instead of fairies. However, Crossley-Holland clarifies that, "No valid distinction though can be drawn between the dwarfs and dark elves; they appear to have been interchangeable" (xxi). In this case, I think determining the work that stayed truer to *The Norse Myths* is how the line is drawn. Riordan and Marvel keep pieces of what inspired each race and discard others.

In their adaptations, Marvel and Riordan had to determine what stories they would tell and what tools would be required to do so. The Norse mythology is vast. Some of it remains a mystery, unexplained in the surviving stories such as the distinction between a dwarf and a dark elf, a description of an elf, or visuals of many of the realms. This gives new authors a chance to be more creative without having preconceived notions or ideas on what something is. For example, Svartalfheim is not described in *The Norse Myths* nor is a dark elf, which gives new writers completely free reign with their imagination.

The Norse myth "Thor's Journey to Utgard" is referenced to varying degrees in the modern works. The myth begins with Thor and Loki setting off for Utgard, a stronghold in Jotunheim. Along the way, Thialfi and Roskva, two humans, join them becoming Thor's servants. Upon their arrival in the halls of Utgard surrounded by giants many times their size, Utgard-Loki, ruler of Utgard, demands to know the skill each excels at as they only allow

masters of something to visit with them. Loki attempts to prove himself the faster eater; he loses. Then, Thialfi lost a footrace. Thor tries to drain a horn in a contest of drinking, but he only manages to drink enough to notice there is a little less than before. Next, he struggles to lift a giant cat above his head only succeeding in getting one of its paws off the ground. Lastly, Thor battles against an old giantess. By the end of their scuffle, they are locked together, and the giantess forces Thor down onto one of his knees. Outside the halls of Utgard, Utgard-Loki confesses to them that he used illusions to trick them. Loki's eating competition was against fire itself. Thialfi lost his footrace to thought. The other end of the horn Thor attempted to drain was in the ocean. The cat he lifted was Jormungand, the Midgard Serpent. Lastly, his opponent in the wrestling match was not a giantess but old age (Crossley-Holland 80-93). Illusions like these are revisited in the modern works. Some are a little easier to spot than others.

Riordan clearly references this myth in *The Hammer of Thor*. He writes it as though the events of "Thor's Journey to Utgard" had taken place exactly as told by Crossley-Holland at some point before the start of his series. The group of heroes travel through Jotunheim to visit Utgard-Loki. Upon arrival, everything is so large Magnus and his companions are smaller than the mugs giants use for drinking. Eventually, Utgard-Loki shifts the world around them so that the giants appear to be seven feet tall; everything else scales as well. While the group already knows that they are surrounded by illusions unlike Thor and his group who did not know until later, they too must beat the giants in competitions. Some of these contests included moving a cat that was actually an elephant and throwing axes at a target but instead of a giant child, the opponent was Fear, a minor deity (314-317, 322-324).

*The Mighty Thor* does not refer to this event the same way as Riordan, yet there are elements of Thor being deceived by illusions. Thor falls under the attack of a monster he refers

to as “man-beast,” but once Thor bests him the creature fades, revealing an old man (375.13). He faces the same situation again with a villain known as Wrecker falling only to reveal an aged man (375.19). He battles another villain – The Absorbing Man – yet Thor struggles to hold back fearing the death of another human when in actuality, this villain is who he appears to be. These illusions were created by Loki in hopes of destroying Thor (375.13, 19, 23).

There is a scene in *Thor: Ragnarök* when Thor meets Dr. Strange, a mystic or wizard. He takes on the appearance of Utgard-Loki in this exchange as he moves Thor room to room with himself by magic. Each teleportation is jarring and disorienting for Thor. This disorientation and manipulation of space are connected to when Utgard-Loki alters Thor’s perception of the size of the world around him in “Thor’s Journey to Utgard” (Crossley-Holland 93). Dr. Strange also offers Thor a drink. As he drinks his beer, the mug refills itself several times, never emptying despite Thor’s efforts. This act is a beautiful reference to when Thor attempts to drain a horn only to find out it was connected to the ocean, which would be impossible for him to empty (Crossley-Holland 90, 93). Thor is not the only character who must contend with Dr. Strange’s illusions. While Thor speaks with Dr. Strange, Loki is trapped in a never-ending freefall. He only escapes from when Dr. Strange decides to hand him back over to Thor. This is where the similarities end. There are no feats of strength or threats of death in the third film *Thor Ragnarök*.

Among these storytellings in *The Norse Myths*, the comic and film franchises, and *The Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* series, there is one common theme – Ragnarök. Each narrative approaches Ragnarök differently, with widely altered endings and each using a unique cast of characters. There are several descriptions of activities that herald the approach of

Ragnarök in the Norse stories. These are told in the myths “Balder’s Dreams,” “The Death of Balder,” and “The Binding of Loki.”

Each narrative follows the precedent that there are signs pointing to Ragnarök, and the characters involved recognize them. The first sign of Ragnarök is in “Balder’s Dreams.” Balder is the son of Odin and Frigg; he is the fairest and most gentle god loved by all of the gods except Loki. In his nightmare, Balder sees dark, monstrous forms creeping towards him. He startles awake feeling fearful and doomed. Odin sets off to find a seeress to discover the meaning of Balder’s dream. She tells him that Hel’s hall is decorated because they are expecting Balder. The seeress reveals Hod, Balder’s blind brother, will kill him (Crossley-Holland 147-148).

“The Death of Balder” picks up where “Balder’s Dreams” left off with the gods discussing how they might save his life. Frigg decides to have every substance in the cosmos agree not to harm Balder such as fire, water, and metals. Upset by this turn of events, Loki disguises himself as a woman and manipulates Frigg into informing him that she obtained oaths to not harm Balder from everything except mistletoe. Loki orchestrates Balder’s death by guiding Hod’s hand with a mistletoe dart and throwing it directly at Balder (Crossley-Holland 150-154). The death of Balder is a large milestone on the path towards Ragnarök. The beginning of Ragnarök will befall Midgard; the lands will be ravaged with wars and three years of winter known as Fimbulvetr. The children of Loki - Fenrir, the wolf, and Jormungand, the World Serpent, free of their bonds and imprisonments will go to Vigrid<sup>8</sup>, the enormous plain where the battle of Ragnarök will take place. After breaking free from his bonds, Loki will sail the ship made of dead men’s nails, Naglfar, to Vigrid bringing with him as many giants as the ship will hold. Surt, the fire giant, will lead those of Muspellheim<sup>9</sup> to Vigrid to join forces with the giants.

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<sup>8</sup> Vigrid (CH, MF) Vigridr (RR)

<sup>9</sup> Muspellheim (CH, RR) Muspelheim (MF) Muspell (MF)

Heimdall will blow his horn signaling Ragnarök to all the realms, calling the gods to council (Crossley-Holland 148, 154, 173-174).

The Aesir and the einherjar will meet their foes at Vigrid. Freyr will fall to Surt, who wields Freyr's former blade. Loki and Heimdall will kill each other. Jormungand will fall by Thor but not before Jormungand manages to cover him in enough venom that Thor, too, will perish. Odin will battle Fenrir, losing his life to him. Fenrir's death comes at the hands of Vidar, son of Odin. He will use his shoe of shoes made from all the extra scraps of leather shoemaking to hold down Fenrir's mouth while his hands grab his other jaw tearing the wolf apart. Surt will burn the nine realms with fire. It is said the gods, the einherjar, men, elves, dwarfs, giants, and monsters will all die (Crossley-Holland 174-175).

But Crossley-Holland goes on to tell what comes after Ragnarök, a rebirth of sorts. Several gods rarely if ever mentioned in previous myths are the ones to survive. These include Vidar and Vali, sons of Odin; Modi and Magni, sons of Thor; and Balder and Hod return from the dead. Two humans Lif and Lifthrasir are also said to survive the fire, and they will repopulate Midgard with humans. There is no mention if any other race survives Ragnarök (Crossley-Holland 175-176).

This violent and terrible fate of the universe believed by the Norse likely came from their experiences with their environment. Harsh winters were not strange or uncommon for them, and those living in places like Iceland would know the destruction volcanoes can cause. These elements are probably what inspired the years of winter signaling Ragnarök and fire being the world's end. However, winter is always followed by spring, when the earth comes to life. Volcanoes do not only cause destruction; the soils deposited by erupting volcanoes are fertile, providing nutrients for plants (Brady and Weil 71). These facts could be the inspiration behind

the rebirth or new world believed to arise after Ragnarök. The absence of the other races in the description of the rebirth is not a shock. Aside from giants, who are predominantly seen as enemies of men, very little is mentioned about these other races throughout the myths. My assumption is the Norse telling this final myth did not find it necessary to include every race, emphasizing that this new world would contain the gods they prayed to and their descendants, men.

Some of the events surrounding Ragnarök from the original myths are incorporated by Marvel into the storyline of their comics. The story slowly builds toward this pinnacle over several issues. The setup for Ragnarök entering the Marvel comic is the beginning of issue 337, when readers first begin catching glimpses of Surtur. Until the final battle against Surtur on Asgard in issue 353, readers continue to see flashes of Surtur's activities in the issues between these two. Marvel uses these glimpses to heavily foreshadow Ragnarök, which continuously reminds their readers that regardless of current conflicts, there is a large threat looming.

The first sign of Ragnarök in the comics is the same as *The Norse Myths*' "Balder's Dreams." As mentioned earlier, Balder has an encounter with the Norns where he receives a warning of the darkness to come (348.8). Balder races to return to Asgard to bring Odin his news, which prompts Odin to reveal the looming threat is Surtur who is determined to destroy them all (349.7-8, 16). While Balder was receiving his warning and traveling back to Asgard, an unnatural winter like Fimbulvetr arrives on Midgard. It was trapped in a magical box that was found and broken open by Malekith, one of the fairies, or dark elves. Luckily for Midgard, it does not last for three years as it does in the myths (348.21). This release of Fimbulvetr allows Surtur to break open Muspell's doors and lead his fire demons out of Muspell (348.24). In Asgard, Odin gathers the gods together for a war council (349.12).

A few other key moments in the heralding of Ragnarök are missing up to this point of the story. For instance, the gods gathered in council, yet Heimdall did not sound his horn to call them together (349.12). Also, the Marvel comics show Balder to be a living character as Ragnarök is beginning, whereas in the myths he had died by this point (Crossley-Holland 154). However, it is explained that Loki killed him at an earlier time (339.11). And although Thor talks about Fenrir's bonds, it can be assumed he remains in them because readers never see him (350.8). Additionally, Loki does not set sail or escape any imprisonment – because he is not imprisoned (344.23).

As the gods ready for war, the army of Asgard, which I believe includes the einherjar, gather on Vigrid, the vast field (350.4). Odin and Heimdall choose to remain behind in Asgard as a last line of defense; Heimdall will sound his horn if Asgard is invaded (350.7, 9). So instead of the armies battling on Vigrid, the armies led by Thor and Surtur clash on Midgard (350.14). Surtur sets the city on fire to manipulate Thor into summoning a thunderstorm to put out the flames and then forcing them away so his army can see to fight. By doing this, Thor inadvertently summoned the Bifrost allowing Surtur to advance alone to Asgard (350.21-23). Heimdall is knocked aside by Surtur, yet he lives to be saved by Thor (351.13). Surtur then battles against Odin, Thor, and Loki in Asgard as he tries to unite his sword and the Eternal Flame which Odin stole from Surtur eons ago (349.19, 353.11). Loki claims to have chosen to side with the gods of Asgard over Surtur, unlike his counterpart in *The Norse Myths*, because he could only approve the destruction of Asgard not all the worlds (353.5). As they faceoff with Surtur, the three gods reveal clear differences between them when they proclaim why they fight. Odin pronounces “for Asgard,” Thor shouts, “for Midgard,” and Loki declares, “for myself” (353.11). These statements display their different motives that have been driving them all



throughout the comics, yet in the face of the true destruction of Ragnarök they join together to defend their values. Finally, the three manage to be victorious over Surtur. But, Surtur's defeat comes at the cost of losing Odin as they both fall over a rift into Muspelheim, shown

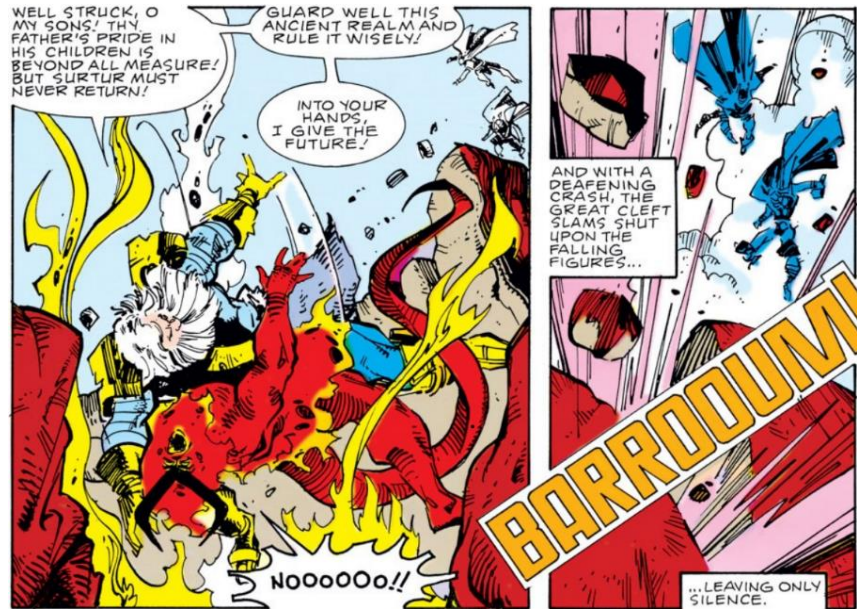


Figure 10. Odin and Surtur falling into Muspelheim, and the rift sealing behind them (353.24).

in the figure to the right, which is then magically sealed by Odin before he presumably perishes (353.24).

In Crossley-Holland's telling, everything that was familiar – the characters, the places, the order – is stripped away by Ragnarök and replaced with new or unfamiliar characters among the ruins of the old world (175). However, in the comic version, the loss is not nearly that great; in fact, it is not really a loss at all. The battle ends in a victory for Asgard with only the loss of one main character, Odin (354.6). The story continues on with little change from before Ragnarök. Thor travels away from the palace of Asgard on a new adventure, and Loki continues his schemes for power (354.17-18).

As the story is nowhere near its end here, Marvel's intention was not to have Ragnarök be the end of this universe. Telling the story this way leaves an underlying message that determination can overcome great obstacles. The writers certainly would not have wanted to kill the main character, Thor, which would have had to happen if they followed the Norse myth of

Ragnarök. Instead Thor's story is further driven by removing Odin. This leaves Thor in an unknown and new situation in his life readers have not seen. There is an acknowledgement to this when Thor says, "Today has taught me something of the sorrows of mortals who must endure such losses throughout their lives" (354.13).

*The Mighty Thor* dealt with the signs, preparations, and actual battle of Ragnarök over the course of several comic issues. Some of those included Balder glimpsing a looming threat, the Aesir gathering their army for the battle, and the gods fighting against Surtur and his army from Muspelheim. Marvel again revisits the event of Ragnarök in its film franchise. The film franchise approaches it in a more condensed version. The signs and the battle of Ragnarök witnessed in the film franchise almost exclusively occur in just the third film *Thor: Ragnarök*.

*Thor: Ragnarök* opens with Surtur explaining to Thor exactly what has to happen for Surtur to destroy Asgard in Ragnarök, which is his destiny. To fully restore his power, Surtur's crown must be united with the Eternal Flame in Asgard's vault similar to how his sword needed the Eternal Flame to be ignited in the comics. He also claims Ragnarök cannot be stopped; that it has already begun. Why is Ragnarök suddenly eminent with no hope of delaying it? Surtur does not provide details to this. My speculation would be Loki's escape from his imprisonment with Thor's assistance in *Thor: Dark World* followed by Loki deposing Odin from the throne might have been the catalyst to Ragnarök, as it also parallels the myths by having Loki escape his bonds. Another possibility would be Odin's quiet, peaceful death after Thor's confrontation with Surtur, which did not happen in *The Norse Myths* and would be a large step away from the original myths. Of course, Odin's death by old age is in itself a huge change. Fenris is unable to be the force that kills Odin. The wolf is never seen until after Odin's death, when Hela raises him

from the dead with the dead army buried under Asgard's palace. Fenris is no longer a brother to Hela; he is her pet fighting by her side.

The other signs provided by Crossley-Holland for Ragnarök do not occur in *Thor: Ragnarök*. Balder does not exist in this story to be killed by Loki. Similarly, Loki's child Jormungand is not a character, so he could not break free to kill Thor. There is no mention of harsh winters taking hold on Midgard. The imprisonment *Thor: Ragnarök* focuses on is Hela's, the goddess of death. Her incarnation here is as Odin's firstborn locked away by him long ago. Upon Odin's death, she is released and goes on a rampage for the throne of Asgard.

Loki arrives separately from the other main characters not on a ship of nails or to fight alongside Surtur but on a spaceship to help Thor against Hela and her undead army. This spaceship change modernizes the Ragnarök story for the modern audience used to and quite enjoying the "space" angle Marvel has introduced to its films such as the *Guardians of the Galaxy* series. In the film, Thor purposely causes Ragnarök, which is an extreme alteration to the original myth. Under Thor's direction, Loki joins Surtur's crown with the Eternal Flame restoring his power and mountainous size. Loki's arrival and role in starting Ragnarök is one of the few similarities to *The Norse Myths* here. Surtur goes on to annihilate Asgard, destroying Hela and himself in the process. Asgard's citizens had already been evacuated, so no other deaths resulted from this. Unfortunately, Surtur does not lead a fiery army to Vigrid, which is a bit of a shame as the vast army of Muspelheim is shown earlier in the film but left there. While Asgard is obliterated at Ragnarök, Surtur burns no other worlds nor affects them at all. The Asgardians flying away in a spaceship with a hope to rebuild and settle on Earth ends this story of *Thor: Ragnarök*.

Among these source materials, this is the only time we see Ragnarök come to pass with the destruction of Asgard. There is a clear shift from the old to the new order most clearly marked by Thor replacing Odin on the throne. The monarch succession and new home are good representations of tearing down the old world and building a new one, which I think are the main elements of Ragnarök and the return of the gods' sons in the myths. The leader for this new order in Marvel is just Thor instead of Odin's other sons and Thor's two sons as it was in the myths.

Unlike the Marvel franchises or even the myths, Riordan's series *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* centers around constant attempts to *start* Ragnarök. Even though Surt gaining Frey's blade, also known as the Sword of Summer or Sumarbrander, is not necessarily considered a sign of Ragnarök, Surt is destined to possess the sword at Ragnarök where he will use the sword to kill Frey in the myths. Riordan begins with Surt trying to take Sumarbrander from its new master Magnus (*The Sword of Summer* 276-278). The other major sign addressed by Riordan in *The Sword of Summer* is Fenris attempting to break loose from his bonds (440). Fenris escaping the dwarven rope, a clear indicator of Ragnarök, is only included by Riordan. This part of Riordan's story is from the Norse myth "Loki's Children and the Binding of Fenrir," which tells how Fenrir was first bound by Gleipnir, the thin silken rope the dwarfs created at the request of the gods. To bind Fenrir, the gods told him he would be able to break it and let him hold Tyr's hand between his jaws as assurance they would not leave him trapped, which is how the god Tyr lost his hand (Crossley-Holland 35-37). Instead of freeing himself, Fenris is rebound with a new dwarven rope. Magnus and company also force Surt back to Muspellheim without Sumarbrander (Riordan, *The Sword of Summer* 468). At the end of *The Hammer of Thor*, Magnus fails to prevent Loki escaping the cave, which pushes his universe towards Ragnarök (Riordan 423). Shortly after this, Riordan includes a sort of loophole to Ragnarök. One of the

characters states, “The unbinding of Loki does help start Ragnarök, but nothing says this escape is his last and final escape. [...] Magnus] you could recapture him [...] postponing Doomsday” (*The Hammer of Thor* 439). I think Riordan does this as an attempt to demonstrate sticking to the old stories by explaining how the story he currently tells is not the same as the end of the world tale. By not ending the world Riordan, along with the Marvel franchises, can continue their stories as long as they wish, entertaining audiences and earning a profit which was not the goal of the Norse myths.

The efforts to postpone Ragnarök continue as Magnus and his friends sail to Niflheim where they recapture Loki before he has the chance to finish building Naglfar, the ship of nails. The only battle that occurs is a quick fight between the giants onboard Naglfar and Magnus’ group as they make their escape from Niflheim into Jotunheim. Without Loki, Naglfar remained in Niflheim, which halted Ragnarök (Riordan, *The Ship of the Dead* 376-382). In Riordan’s recreation, there is no Ragnarök and end of the world. His story states Ragnarök can be delayed; the events that announce its beginning can be undone. It is worth noting that because Naglfar does not leave and there is no impending battle, Heimdall has no reason to blow his horn to summon the gods to a war council. Though, the gods have a council of sorts. Magnus’ boat sailed the group to the shores of Vigridr. Several of the gods gathered there to congratulate the heroes on their success and accept the captured Loki (*The Ship of the Dead* 387-388).

In contrast to the myths and Marvel franchises, Riordan focuses entirely on teenagers over the gods. Most of these characters are demigods and several are einherjar – awaiting Ragnarök in Valhalla. Riordan’s choice to focus on children of the Old Norse gods is a nice tie into the after-Ragnarök description from Crossley-Holland where only children of the major gods, who were rarely if ever mentioned in other myths, survive. Even though Ragnarök had not

already passed and did not occur in Riordan's series, it is almost as if it had because his story focusses on their children in these modern times. When comparing the setting of today's time from centuries ago when the Norse myths were the beliefs of the Norse people, one could say that there is a new world order almost as if Ragnarök really did happen.

Riordan easily does the best job of keeping the signals of Ragnarök closest to Crossley-Holland's description of the Norse myths. However, his story centers around preventing it, so the readers do not see Riordan's Ragnarök version unfold. Because of this, the closest work to the actual event of Ragnarök cannot be Riordan's *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* series.

If a closest or best followed story to Ragnarök in *The Norse Myths* had to be chosen, then the decision between Marvel's *The Mighty Thor* and movies is a difficult one. Both of these works focused on different aspects of Ragnarök. *The Mighty Thor* involved Balder, Midgard's winter, Surtur, and the gods gathering for a council; meanwhile, *Thor: Ragnarök* included Loki arriving on a ship, Surtur fulfilling his destiny, and Odin dying. I think *Thor: Ragnarök* deserves the credit here because the audience witnesses the fall of Asgard. Ragnarök is not supposed to be a trial the Aesir overcome victoriously; it is supposed to be a defeat forcing those left to rebuild, which *Thor: Ragnarök* clearly does, though not perfectly.

Marvel and Riordan make money by continuously entertaining people with stories and films so that they buy them. A final ending like Ragnarök simply cannot be fully retold in a modern retelling if there is any intention to keep a franchise going because Ragnarök destroys the known universe. Additionally, American audiences have a tendency to want and expect happy endings. This can be observed across a wide range of literature and film. The hero of the story, against all odds and dodging bullets, makes it out alive and comes out on top. Norse mythology was based on the Norsemen's reality and the world around them. In their reality, not

every battle was won nor did anyone live forever. The myth of “Ragnarök” clearly reflects those experiences. The Norse gods *lose* to the giants. This is a race Thor is described as beating over-and-over throughout the myths such as in “The Lay of Grímnir,” The Lay of Thrym,” “The Lay of Hymir,” “Thor’s Dual with Hrungnir,” yet in the end, Thor falls alongside the other gods.

Comparing the various modern versions of the Norse myths is a daunting process. The world of Norse Mythology alone is vast. My attempt to compare these three separate works was made additionally difficult by each story pulling different pieces from Norse Mythology to create new stories. Throughout my analysis, I found that no single work succeeded in staying true to *The Norse Myths* in all aspects. Each retelling seems to keep their characters similar to the originals, have those characters’ adventures the same, or maintain the result of Ragnarök but never all three. These modern works are creative reinterpretations that pay a beautiful homage to the Norse people and their mythology.

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